

CDC Committee on English Language Education 2009 - 2011
Gist of the Second Meeting

Date: 8 July 2010
Time: 4:30 p.m.
Venue: Room 3603-3608, 248 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

1. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2009

The minutes of the last meeting were confirmed without any amendments.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

- The HKEAA officer informed members that the 'Listening descriptors' would be replaced by the 'Listening and Integrated Skills descriptors'.
- Two professional development sessions focusing on the integration of skills would be conducted by the HKEAA in November and December 2010.
- Exemplars for the purpose of illustrating "a wide range" and "a range" of sentence structures as depicted in the Listening and Integrated Skills descriptors would not be revised.
- EDB colleagues would be invited to participate in the markers' meeting in determining the cut score.
- Regarding the possibility of developing an anthology for Literature in English for school use, it was reported that AQA, one of the exam boards in the United Kingdom, had been contacted to find out the difficulties the organisation had encountered in developing their own anthology and the time involved in production.

3. Report and discussion on the findings and observations from the curriculum development (CD) visits conducted by the English Language Education Section

Observations and issues related to the implementation of the NSS curriculum and the HKDSE exam

- It was observed that schools had good preparation for the implementation of the NSS curriculum. However, schools expressed uncertainty over the breadth and depth of the teaching content and the requirements of the HKDSE for English Language, leading to the use of a massive range of textbooks and learning materials.
- Teacher members expressed concerns about the teaching of the Language Art elective modules as they were not clear about the language skills and the extent of technical knowledge that students were required to demonstrate in the HKDSE, particularly in the writing paper. The HKEAA officer responded that candidates were expected to use common literary terms to answer the questions and they would not be penalised for misspelling the technical terms if their ideas and feelings could be clearly conveyed.
- Many schools expressed concerns about the schedules of the HKDSE in 2012, particularly the oral examination. Schools hoped that the schedule could be released earlier to facilitate schools' planning. The HKEAA officer anticipated that the HKDSE would fall between the current Advanced Level and CE Level examination periods pending the decision of the Committee.
- It was reported that schools would like to have more sample or practice papers, exemplars of students' performance and professional development programmes/information sessions to help teachers prepare students for the HKDSE. Teachers had urgently requested the practice papers to be disseminated earlier, preferably towards the end of the 2010/11 school year. The HKEAA officer responded that it was not possible to disseminate earlier during the transitional period as the HKEAA had to set a number of papers for different examinations in the same period. He anticipated that the practice papers would be ready in early 2012.
- Teachers expressed concerns about the graded approach as students might not be able to make effective decisions on which section of the paper to attempt under a stressful situation. It was suggested that time should be given for candidates to read through the questions before the examination began.
- Teacher members commented that the level of difficulty of the Reading paper should be lowered to cater for learner diversity. The HKEAA officer responded that the level of difficulty of the HKDSE should be pitched between that of the CE and ASL examinations.

Observations and issues related to the implementation of the primary curriculum

- It was observed that schools were aware of the importance of creating a language-rich environment. Students had easy access to books in the school campus. Print materials were displayed in the classroom and corridors. Opportunities were also provided for students to use English for communication and various English learning activities were conducted with the help of the NET.
- It was reported that about 250 primary schools had participated in the Reading Programmes conducted by the NET Section, e.g. the PLP-R and PLP-R&W at Key Stage 1 (KS1). Shared reading and guided reading were used by teachers to develop students' interest in reading and help them acquire basic reading skills. Books selected in KS1 were mostly narrative texts that were related to the modules in the textbooks. Phonics skills were introduced since KS1. Students were encouraged to sound out unfamiliar words using their phonics skills. More open-ended questions were used to stimulate students' critical thinking and creativity and more teacher-student interaction was observed during the CD visits.
- Members expressed that Secondary 1 students were confident in speaking in English but generally weak in grammatical knowledge. It was suggested that more focus should be put on teaching grammatical items and writing skills.
- It was remarked that the implementation of the reading workshops/programmes needed to be further enhanced at KS2. Students should be exposed to a wider range of text types, including both narrative and information texts. There should be a progressive development of reading skills as students progress from KS1 to KS2. A broader range of reading skills should be taught explicitly to students. Different teaching strategies for reading should be used to help students process and handle longer texts so as to facilitate the transition from primary to secondary levels. The CDI officer reported that professional development programmes would continue to be organised to help teachers develop the skills and strategies in implementing the various teaching strategies for reading and conducting different reading activities. Seed projects were being conducted to explore effective strategies to enhance the implementation of the reading workshops at KS2.
- It was observed that students in general had limited vocabulary and they were comparatively weak in writing. Teachers tended to explain the meaning of new words with the help of pictures or gestures instead of teaching students the vocabulary building skills. Students should be helped to develop the awareness and knowledge of word formation and word association and be provided with opportunities to apply the target vocabulary learnt. To address the issue, it was reported that existing professional development programmes would be reviewed and improved to enhance teachers' skills and strategies in developing students' vocabulary building skills and writing skills. A resource package on 'Enhancing English Vocabulary Learning and Teaching at Primary Level' had been produced and disseminated to schools.
- It was commented that some schools allocated a heavy weighting to dictation. The CDI officer responded schools were advised to allocate not more than 10% of the total subject mark to dictation. It was added that a leaflet on 'Dictation Activity at Primary Level' had been disseminated to parents recently to give suggestions on how they could help their children prepare for dictation and develop good English learning habits. A package on 'Using Dictation to Develop Students' Listening and Writing Skills' would also be prepared to introduce to teachers different dictation activities to develop students' enabling skills and integrated language skills.

4. A.O.B

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 6:05p.m.